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Q & A With Bill Cooley

William C. Cooley has been the Central Intelligence Agency's personnel representative for Northern California and the Northwest for the last six years. He has worked for the agency 20 years.

Spartan Daily reporter Karol Warner spoke with Cooley about the CIA.

Q: What are different jobs offered by the CIA?

A: Most people don't realize that we do a good deal of research and analysis, that is sort of an academic type of activity where you do library type research and analytical work. We hire engineers and people in the administrative offices, logistics, personnel, finance and medical services personnel.

Q: What is the function of a CIA agent (operations officer)?

A: First let me say they are not the James Bond image, everybody's got that point of view. The operations officers are people who primarily serve overseas. They primarily work abroad with and through foreign nationals of various countries to acquire information and therefore they need very good language skills.

Q: Do other countries have an idea who the operations officers might be?

A: No. It's not the type of thing (where) anyone conversant in the language could go over to a country, read the newspaper and cut out the articles and send them back. It's beyond that it's more trying to find out the real tough things that maybe a country doesn't really want you to know. Maybe they have a big scientific program going to that they are keeping hush-hush or maybe missile development.

Q: How much danger is the operations officer placed in?

A: I think the danger thing is overplayed but naturally it would depend on where you are and what is currently going on. If you are in a location that's a hot bed of activity and there is a lot of anti-American feeling then anybody that's American is going to have his or her problems.

Q: What are the qualifications for people working in different areas of the CIA?

A: For an operations officer, obviously the person does have to be, say, maybe a little more outgoing than a researcher back in Virginia. It doesn't mean that the researchers aren't outgoing either; it's just that you do need a little bit different of a personality. We're looking for people who are very, very sharp and we do have, I think, a very good screening process. We don't go strictly by GPA but we do look at it.

How tough is it to get a job with the CIA?

A: If you are basically sharp and intelligent that is certainly one big plus that we are looking for. If you have no serious medical problems, we do have to get a medical clearance on you, we also have to get a security clearance and I might point out here, our biggest problem on security clearance is the drug usage situation.

What that boils down to in the simplest terms is that if a person has been into marijuana or any of the other drugs other than alcohol to any extent during the past year we will probably have difficulty giving them a security clearance. But if it's a case where they've tried it before and they have really gotten away from it I don't think that's a problem either.

Q: How much do you think the average American person knows about the CIA?

A: I don't think that the average person knows too much about the agency although we have tried in the past five or six years to put out general information for the public. The average American citizen doesn't know a great deal about the agency yet there are a lot of books that have been written about the agency pro and con. We even have a bibliography that lists books names on it.

Q: Where do people get their negative images of the CIA?

A: Well I think a lot of it has come out of the press. I think people don't follow it too much and there is an old saying that a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing.

They don't really understand the agency and they probably haven't made

any attempt to really find out anything about it. They pick something up here and there and form opinions from this. We are trying to counterbalance this by going more public and making more information available.

Q: Which of the policy makers in the government utilize the information gathered by the CIA?

A: The White House, the president's adviser on national security affairs and the National Security Council, all of those people can generate questions. They say here's the problem, give us your projections on it.

Q: Why would a person want to work for the CIA? What are the benefits?

A: I think we can offer pretty good career opportunities. We aren't affected too much by the rise and fall of the economy. I'm not just talking about now but about the long haul over the last 20 to 25 years. We don't have an unlimited budget so we do have to work within constraints like that too.

We do offer a challenge to work with top flight people from around this country. I've been very impressed with the caliber of people that I've known over my 20 years with the agency.

Q: What is the starting pay for someone with no experience?

A: A qualified operations officer with an undergraduate degree only, we could start at \$18,339. For a researcher with the master's degree we can start him at \$20,256. For the engineer at the bachelor's level, say electronic engineer because that is our main requirement as far as engineers, at 21,000. There is good upward mobility.

Q: Where might an operations officer be sent for service?

A: I tell everybody that you have to be available, theoretically, on a worldwide basis. We break the operations groups down to two graphic divisions but you can transfer from one division to another. You could go for a while in the Asian area then you could conceivably go to Latin America then to Africa or someplace else.

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